



WORKPLACE SAFETY AND HEALTH IN WISCONSIN

*From The
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health*



State Profile 2002

*Delivering on the Nation's promise:
Safety and health at work for all people through prevention.*

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

NIOSH is the primary federal agency responsible for conducting research and making recommendations for the prevention of work-related illness and injury. NIOSH is located in the Department of Health and Human Services in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The NIOSH mission is to provide national and world leadership to prevent work-related illness, injury, disability, and death by gathering information, conducting scientific research, and translating the knowledge gained into products and services. As part of its mission, NIOSH supports programs in every state to improve the health and safety of workers. NIOSH has developed this document to highlight recent NIOSH programs important to workers and employers in Wisconsin.

The Burden of Occupational Illness and Injury in Wisconsin

- In Wisconsin, there are approximately 2.8 million individuals employed in the workforce.¹
- In 2000, 107 workers died as a result of workplace injuries.²
- The agriculture, forestry, and fishing industry had the highest number of fatalities, followed second by the services industry, and third by the transportation and public utilities industry.²
- In 1999, the most recent year for which data are available, the rate of fatal workplace injuries was 3.7 deaths per 100,000 workers—below the national average rate of 4.5 deaths per 100,000 workers.²
- In 2000, there were 200,100 nonfatal workplace injuries and illnesses in Wisconsin.³

The Cost of Occupational Injury and Illness in Wisconsin

In 2000, the most recent year for which data are available, a total of \$703.3 million was paid for workers' compensation claims by Wisconsin private insurers and self-insured employers.⁴ This figure does not include compensation paid to workers employed by the federal government and also underestimates the total financial burden for private sector businesses, since only a fraction of health care costs and earnings lost through work injuries and illnesses is covered by workers' compensation. Chronic occupational illnesses like cancer are substantially under-reported in workers' compensation systems, because work-relatedness is often difficult to establish.

How NIOSH Prevents Worker Injuries and Diseases in Wisconsin

Health Hazard Evaluations (HHEs) and Technical Assistance

NIOSH evaluates workplace hazards and recommends solutions when requested by employers, workers, or state or federal agencies. Since 1993, NIOSH has responded to 55 requests for HHEs in Wisconsin, in a variety of industrial settings, including the following example:

Union Grove, Wisconsin: Mercury Overexposure

In 1998-99, NIOSH responded to a request for an HHE from the Wisconsin Department of Health and Social Services concerning potential health effects related to mercury exposure among employees of a mercury recycling plant in Union Grove, Wisconsin. NIOSH investigators concluded that 13 out of 16 employees had average mercury levels above the recommended exposure level. Recommendations included providing annual training on the hazards of working with mercury, regularly checking exposed workers' urine, temporarily removing from exposure workers with high urine mercury levels, and reporting health concerns regarding possible mercury exposure to a physician.

Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE) Investigations

NIOSH developed the FACE program to identify work situations with a high risk of fatality and to formulate and disseminate prevention strategies. In Wisconsin, FACE is conducted by the Department of Health and Family Services under a cooperative agreement with NIOSH. Since 1995, there have been a total of 43 FACE investigations in Wisconsin, including the following example:

Wisconsin: Youth Camp Counselor Dies of Carbon Monoxide (CO) Poisoning

On August 22, 2000, a 15-year-old male camp counselor died of carbon monoxide poisoning when the furnace malfunctioned in the cabin where he was sleeping alone. The victim was assisting with clean-up after the camp closed. His cabin had a furnace room with a gas fueled furnace and a gas fueled water heater. The water heater was used continuously throughout the summer, while the furnace was used only infrequently and for brief time periods. There were no records to indicate when the furnace and water heater had been inspected or repaired. There were two smoke detectors in the cabin but no CO detectors. The victim turned on the furnace before he went to bed, keeping the windows and doors closed. The FACE investigator concluded that, to prevent similar occurrences, employers should install CO detectors in buildings with gas fueled appliances and ensure that gas fueled appliances are installed and maintained to prevent production and build-up of CO.

Building State Capacity

The Adult Blood Lead Epidemiology and Surveillance Program (ABLES)

NIOSH funds ABLES in the Wisconsin Department of Health and Social Services. Through ABLES, Health and Family Services Department staff track and respond to cases of excessive lead exposure in adults which can cause a variety of adverse health outcomes such as kidney or nervous system damage and potential infertility.

Midwest Center for Agricultural Disease and Injury Research, Education, and Prevention

The Midwest Center, located in the National Farm Medicine Center, is one of ten NIOSH Centers for Agricultural Disease and Injury Research, Education, and Prevention nationwide. The Center's initiatives

include: assessing the impact of agricultural production upon women's health; developing and evaluating model health promotion and disease and injury prevention programs for agricultural work sites; and providing consultation and training to educators, safety specialists, engineers, agricultural extension staff, and clinicians.

National Children's Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety

NIOSH funds the National Children's Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety, which is based at Marshfield Clinic in Marshfield, Wisconsin, and is one of the largest rural healthcare facilities in the United States. The Center provides guidance, technical assistance, and training on childhood injury prevention. In addition, the Center collaborates with and supports agricultural organizations, health and safety professionals, and groups serving youth. In 1999, the Center completed the North American Guidelines for Children's Agricultural Tasks, a parents' guide of developmentally appropriate agricultural jobs for youth. In fiscal year 2000, a grant was completed for developing training materials for health professionals on childhood agricultural injury prevention.

Extramural Programs Funded by NIOSH

The following are examples of recent research contracts, research grants, training grants, or cooperative agreements funded by NIOSH in the state of Wisconsin.

University of Wisconsin-Stout

A master's level program in risk control, with a focus in safety engineering, industrial hygiene, and managerial research, has been conducted since 1974 at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. In fiscal year 2001, there were 37 students enrolled and 18 graduates of the program.

The Youth Employment Training Pilot Program

NIOSH currently funds the state of Wisconsin to develop and implement a new model for youth injury surveillance that will be linked with the state's youth work permit system. In addition, funding is provided to develop school-based computerized safety training programs and surveys for working minors, and to create a website and hotline to address student work safety concerns. Data from the surveys will be used to determine whether youths who have obtained work permits are less likely to experience a work-related injury.

Additional information regarding NIOSH services and activities can be accessed through the NIOSH home page at <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/homepage.html> or by calling the NIOSH 800-number at 1-800-356-NIOSH (1-800-356-4674).

¹U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Local Area Unemployment Statistics, Current Population Survey, 2000.

²DOL, BLS in cooperation with state and federal agencies, Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, 1999-2000.

³DOL, BLS in cooperation with participating state agencies, Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses, 2000.

⁴National Academy of Social Insurance, *Workers' Compensation: Benefits, Coverage, and Costs, 2000 New Estimates*, May 2002.